

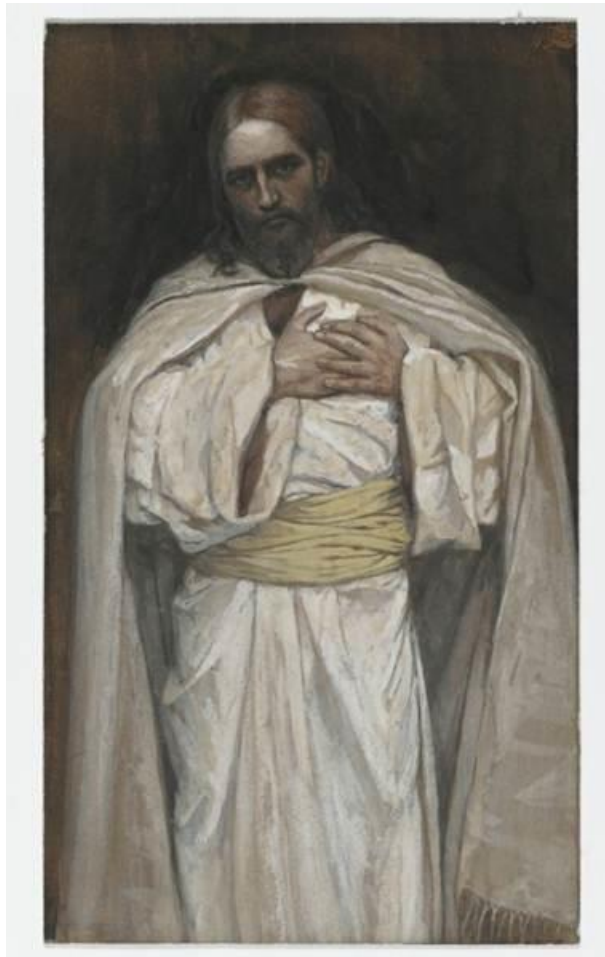


Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A



Our Lord Jesus Christ. By **James Tissot** (1836-1902), a French painter. Brooklyn Museum, @ 1886 and 1894.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2. Use the prayer provided below.

Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola

*Eternal Word,
only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy is a deeper invitation to live the Paschal Mystery.
- ▶ Jesus invites us to lose our lives for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ The way of salvation is the way of the Cross.
- ▶ There is no other way for the true disciple.
- ▶ Jesus loves us unto death and invites us to do the same for others through the power of grace.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, or word from the homily spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

- ▶ Jeremiah is an Old Testament prophet par excellence who foreshadows Christ's call to carry one's cross.
- ▶ He too heralds the way of suffering as a means of witness to God's faithfulness.
- ▶ Such is the crux of the Christian kerygma.
- ▶ Paul preached the way of the cross as well. Jesus Christ crucified was the hallmark of his preaching.
- ▶ The Christian Gospel goes out to the world through the witness of self-sacrificing suffering and kenosis.
- ▶ Jeremiah was derided, hated, and scorned for preaching a just, faithful word.
- ▶ The word burned in his soul so he could do no less than preach God's word, regardless the consequences.
- ▶ Jeremiah did not expect the rejection he experienced. His frustration is palpable.
- ▶ Jeremiah spoke against the temple worship services and insisted that Jerusalem would experience destruction. In the reign of King.
- ▶ The consequences of his prophecy were beating and imprisonment.
- ▶ He nevertheless remained steadfast in his preaching.
- ▶ Today we see hints of doubt and depression and self-pity.
- ▶ He questioned his own ability to live up to the demands of his ministry.
- ▶ How could God have chosen him? He was simply not up to the challenge.
- ▶ God insists that not only is Jeremiah up to the challenge, but God chose him before he was even born. He was an integral part of God's plan of salvation.
- ▶ No matter how frustrated, upset, depressed or angry he found himself, the word burned in his heart and he could not be silenced even in spite of himself.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ How have you experienced the compulsion to speak the truth or stand up for righteousness no matter the cost?
- ▶ How do you feel about the truth that witness to God always invites challenge and suffering?
- ▶ Have you ever suffered for the sake of right, or the sake of the Gospel?
- ▶ Who do you know in our world who has suffered for the sake of the Gospel? What do they have to teach us today?

Second Reading: Romans 12:1-2

- ▶ Paul insists that moral problems can only be solved in light of God’s incredible plan of salvation.
- ▶ Paul understands true worship as living the moral imperatives of the Gospel—good Gospel living.
- ▶ Scripture demands that worship and ethical living go hand-in-hand.
- ▶ There is no greater arrogance than to participate in worship only to live an unrighteous, unethical life. Such a life dishonors God.
- ▶ Liturgy has everything to do with the way we live our lives. Liturgy exhorts us to go out and live the Gospel.
- ▶ Failure to live according to the ethical demands of the Gospel is an abomination before God.
- ▶ Liturgy is intimately connected with our every day lives. It empowers us to live what we have heard, what we have seen and what we have consumed in the Eucharistic feast.
- ▶ Jesus showed us by the way he lived his life what constitutes true worship of his heavenly Father.
- ▶ True conversion is evidenced by ethical behavior.
- ▶ True conversion means that discernment and life decisions are rooted in the ethical imperatives of sacred Scripture.
- ▶ Conversion assumes a transformed mind and heart; a converted person is a new creation in Christ.
- ▶ Converted Christians take up their cross and continue to open themselves to the ongoing transformation the liturgy invites.
- ▶ We gather to make present the life, death and resurrection of Christ and make it operative in our lives.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a brief story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ In what way have you been brought into or experienced a deeper intimacy with God? What evidence is there in your life?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that you have experienced conversion to Christ?
- ▶ What does living the ethical demands of the Gospel” mean to you?

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
 - ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
-
- ▶ Jesus leads his disciples into the heart of his mission. It is a sobering encounter.
 - ▶ Jesus wants to make sure his disciples understand the import of what is about to take place.
 - ▶ Peter’s profession and confession of Jesus as Messiah and Lord assumes that he and all disciples must understand the implications and seriousness of Jesus’ mission.
 - ▶ Disciples must understand the will of God and his plan for the salvation of the world.
 - ▶ God ordains that his Son, the Messiah promised by the prophets, will suffer and die for the sins of the world.
 - ▶ At this juncture there is no reason given for the suffering Jesus must endure—only that he must endure it. More will be revealed at a later time.
 - ▶ This Messiah is not the messiah the people expected. The people expected a military warrior that would liberate the people of Israel—a mighty warrior that would inflict suffering on the enemies of Israel.
 - ▶ Jesus lays that dream to rest. He will be the unexpected Suffering Servant of God foretold by the prophet Isaiah. He has come to fulfill God’s plan of salvation. Rather than God’s enemies, Jesus, God’s Servant will be the one to suffer.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions.

- ▶ The disciples were expecting a militaristic messiah that would restore Israel to its former glory. That is a very human thing to hope for—all of Israel hoped for that type of Messiah. How can we relate today to such a desire?
- ▶ If you were to choose the kind of Messiah or God that you would want, what kind of a God would it be?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about our expectations of God?

Further reflections:

- ▶ Values of the world dictate that if indeed the power of hell is promised not to stand against the new kingdom of God, then the king of that kingdom should hardly have to suffer for it.
- ▶ The king should be immune from suffering and death.
- ▶ Peter may have unconsciously hoped that to be true thus bypassing suffering and immediately entering the glory of the new kingdom. How human of him! Is that not the secret wish of all of us?
- ▶ Jesus echoes his temptation scene in the desert as he rebukes Peter and cries out, “Get behind me, Satan”.
- ▶ Peter’s avoidance of suffering is not in accord with God’s will.
- ▶ Peter, just like Satan in the desert, attempts to entice Jesus away from his intended mission—suffering, passion and death on a cross. Like Satan in the desert Peter holds up the promise of a glorious kingdom and Jesus as the exalted leader.
- ▶ Jesus is definitive: Peter simply must get out of the way and not be an obstacle to God’s saving plan.
- ▶ The pericope is dripping with irony. Peter “the rock” is told not to be a stumbling rock—not to be the obstacle.
- ▶ Jesus will not be manipulated by human whim and willful desire.
- ▶ Jesus chastises Peter, but he does not reject him.
- ▶ He simply tells him to get out of the way, to get behind him and follow him.
- ▶ Jesus tells him what he must do to follow him. Peter must take up his cross and embrace the way of suffering, denial and kenosis.
- ▶ Jesus continues to offer healing, forgiveness and reconciliation and is confident that Peter will rise to the occasion and embrace Jesus’ paschal mission.
- ▶ Jesus then taught the disciples what it means to be a good disciple. It is one thing to make a confession of faith, it is quite another to pattern one’s life after the Shepherd of Souls. Disciples must pour themselves out for others, practice self-denial and kenosis and center their entire being on Christ.

- ▶ Disciples must daily take up their cross and follow the way of Jesus, the way of dying and rising.
- ▶ The Semitic understanding of the phrase, *deny yourself*, simply means to give the self a lower priority that is given to others. Self-denial assumes that the one denying self will avoid the entrapments of the world and offer himself or herself completely to God.
- ▶ Passion, will, temptation and desire is to be ordered to God's will—not human folly.
- ▶ Professing Jesus as Lord implies that we follow Christ even in the face of suffering, persecution, misunderstanding, scorn and derision.
- ▶ Disciples are called to live for others and to be daring and unafraid in the face of persecution and suffering for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ There is a temptation to reduce this Gospel to offering our daily troubles and annoyances to God for the sake of the kingdom. While that is a praiseworthy endeavor, the implications of this Gospel are far greater.
- ▶ Jesus endured a shameful death. He was an innocent servant of God who endured the death penalty for the sake of a sinful world.
- ▶ The implication of this Gospel is that we are invited to suffer *for the sake of the Gospel*—to endure ridicule, scorn, persecution and shame when we stand up for Gospel values.
- ▶ Christ took a vehicle of torture and shame—the Cross--and made it into a source of salvation for the world—a source of faith and hope.
- ▶ The cross is the means of our redemption.
- ▶ Those who embrace the demands of today's Gospel lose nothing, they gain everything—they gain their lives and find the ultimate meaning for drawing breath. How great a gift!
- ▶ We will be judged according to the way we have lived for others.
- ▶ Thus we pray with St. Thomas Aquinas:
 - The Cross is my sure salvation.
 - The Cross I ever adore.
 - The Cross of my Lord is with me.
 - The Cross is my refuge.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever gotten in the way of what God wanted you to do or what was right?
- ▶ Have you ever taken the easy road and regretted it? Explain.
- ▶ What does this gospel teach us regarding the road less traveled?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when Jesus tells you to take up your cross and follow him? How might you take up your cross in your life today?
- ▶ While offering your daily dying and risings to Christ is a worthy endeavor, Jesus invites us to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Can you envision being called upon to suffer persecution, scorn, or derision for the sake of the Gospel?
- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR
Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- What does it mean to you when Jesus tells us to take up your cross and follow him? How might you take up your cross in your life today?

When Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow him I find it very easy to reduce that to simply offering the daily problems of life. God wants me to offer my life—all of it—to him. Yet there is more being asked in this Gospel. Jesus invites us to suffer for the sake of the Gospel.

Most of us will never know what it means to be thrown into the lion's den for our faith, but there are a legion of ways throughout our lives that we will be called upon to endure ridicule, misunderstanding and derision and often, sad to say, from within our own faith communities.

One brief experience comes to mind. I was witnessing to the power of God in my life and the life of my family at an event in which I was giving a presentation. I was witnessing to the way God has miraculously manifested himself to us in a number of circumstances in our life. I was sharing a profound experience of God's intervention, much like I have done in these sessions week after week. One of my confreres laughed and in essence told me he did not believe my story.

His response hurt me deeply and made me realize that not everyone believes us as we share the Good News of God's action in our lives. Such witness makes us vulnerable. My initial reaction was embarrassment and the brief, fleeting thought that I did not want to put myself in that position again. Then I realized that this is exactly what Jesus is asking of us today—to be willing to endure any consequence in our pursuit of sharing the Good News.

My little embarrassment is a small thing, but when every Christian is willing to share their faith with courage, the Gospel goes forward. Few of us will be martyrs for the faith, but every time we resist the temptation to avoid suffering for our faith no matter how small, we are following the imperatives Jesus set forth in today's Gospel.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Jesus Christ
Cross and Paschal Mystery
Kingdom of God
Salvation/Soteriology

Morality
Moral Decision Making
Faith
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well. Choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus reminds Peter and his disciples of his mission to establish the reign of God. He is the long awaited Messiah who will suffer persecution for the sake of the kingdom. It is thus appropriate that today we address what the Church teaches about JESUS CHRIST.

CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

Today's liturgy reminds us that embracing one's cross means to endure ridicule and hostility from those who reject God. Disciples must be prepared to endure persecution because of the gospel. The cross is the source of humanity's redemption. This instrument of torture was transformed into our hope. Such is the focus of today's Gospel. Thus it is fitting that we focus our attention on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus presents the blue print for living a reciprocal relationship with his Father. The liturgies and the Gospels of these weeks provide us with a front row seat at Jesus' crucial mission of establishing the kingdom. Today reminds Peter that Christian discipleship in the reign of God means that the disciple must suffer for the sake of the kingdom. It is most fitting that today's extended session focuses on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

MORALITY

The focus of today's reading from Romans deals with the ethical imperative of the Gospel. Ethical issues can only be discussed in light of God's saving act of redemption through Jesus. Living the Christian ethic has been called true Christian worship. As far as Paul is concerned true Christian worship exists in the way in which the Christian lives his or her life. We can do no less than live the moral life in response to God's great act of redemption. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

The focus of today's reading from Romans deals with the ethical imperative of the Gospel. Ethical issues can only be discussed in light of God's saving act of redemption through Jesus. Living the Christian ethic has been called true Christian worship. As far as Paul is concerned true Christian worship exists in the way in which the Christian lives his or her life. We can do no less than live the moral life in response to God's great act of redemption. Our moral decisions then are based on our reciprocal relationship with God and authentic discipleship. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Jesus saved us by offering his life on the cross for the sins of the world. In today's Gospel he presents his catechism on suffering for the sake of the kingdom. He slowly reveals his plan of salvation to his disciples who resist the implications of the cross and who are slow in coming to full awareness of his saving plan for the world. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

FAITH

The only way one can truly appreciate all that the kingdom of God has to offer is through eyes of faith. One can hardly embrace the suffering and persecution that is expected without faith. Once a person has faith in Christ and the kingdom he came to establish he or she would risk everything to keep it. This is only possible if that person has deep conversion of heart—if that person has faith. It is thus appropriate that today's liturgy invites us to reflect on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.